



Catherine da Costa Self Portrait

Catherine da Costa - Miniaturist
Murder Most Foul !
The Rescue of a Million Books
1657-The First Synagogue



It must be rare that there is such uncertainty between the date of writing a piece and the date of its publication, but as I write, still during more or less total shut-down, who knows what our daily lives and community will be like in a couple of months?

I have been delighted with our congregation's response to Covid-19. Our Executive, led by Chairman Jeffrey Ohrenstein and incoming Chairman, Michele Raba, acted quickly, rounding up the Executive and deciding to stop community gatherings; they did so a week before most other communities. I was not sure about the decision at the time but respected the way in which it was taken. Now I know that it was the right decision; it may have genuinely saved lives and no doubt it spared some suffering.

More than thirty members quickly volunteered to call a further 200 members, to see how they were and to offer help with shopping, medicine, or simply regular chats. The urgent need provided the impetus to develop a crucial area of Synagogue life, with our member Andrea Killick, a Doctor, in her spare time leading a growing *Chesed* (care) team of members, volunteering to care for the community, with strong administrative support and professional guidance.

Our ways of communicating and congregating were quickly translated, consolidated, and in some cases expanded for our new situation. Yael Roberts, our Director of Community and Education, galvanised our teaching staff and families to enable brilliant

gatherings and education - and she and I led a vital learning series on *Times of Uncertainty and Difficulty*.

I know how much it meant to many of you to have a communal Seder, celebrating freedom during lockdown, with our Emeritus Rabbi Thomas and, of course, Renee. These difficult times have shown the vitality of our community. Members have told me that these gatherings - and the relationships and conversations that they cultivate - are keeping them sane.

This is a time for us to cultivate humility. In Chapter 19 of *Vayikra* (Leviticus) we are told *Tihyu kedoshim ki kadosh ani Adonai*. (You shall be holy for I the Eternal am holy.) The term *kadosh*, or holy, is multifaceted - so what is being asked of us? Rashi, the eleventh century French commentator, says - referring to an earlier commentary - 'in every fence there is sacredness'. So we ask ourselves what acts of restraint could we reinforce and bring to our lives to benefit ourselves, others and our world? Let us commit to these acts.

the more we know, the more we know that we're ignorant

The *Kedushat Levi*, the late eighteenth century Chasidic Rabbi, explores a paradox in the instruction 'Be sacred for I the Eternal am sacred', and he draws an important paradoxical lesson for us. The *Kedushat Levi* asks whether it is possible that the verse is suggesting that we can have the same level of sanctity as the Divine. He states that the answer is 'No', that the Ultimately Sacred is unapproachably Separate and Beautiful, inexpressibly great. So, for the *Kedushat Levi*, this is what the verse is teaching us to do - recognise Greatness, and encounter that Greatness by simultaneously coming close to it, and seeing how small you are in its light.

As each of us grows, we become more aware of our deficiencies; the more we know, the more we know that we're

ignorant; the more we do, the more painfully aware we are of how much needs to be done. That feeling could prompt us to give up, to look away, but the *Kedushat Levi* reminds us that one Commandment leads to another and that during *Chanukah* we light a candle each day and see how the world is getting darker at that time of year. He tells us to call out in prayer and to do sacred acts, in order to start coming closer to Greatness and to great humility.

This pandemic has been caused partly by a lack of humility, for we eat whatever we want, we destroy natural habitats and make wild animals our curious playthings; we fly so much and we spread infection. We might heed the warning that these times could be but a minor dress-rehearsal for the full expression of climate disaster that awaits us if we do not humbly change our ways. These times invite humility; to step back and appreciate that the world is not ours, and that other people's lives are as important as our own. This is a time to see the beauty of the world and the evils that kill.

In our separateness we have an invitation to improve ourselves and to learn; we must be struck by how much there is to improve and how much we don't know. We are now invited to find small ways of doing good and we must see how much good there is to do - and how badly it needs doing.

We are lucky to be part of such a community in which to take on this sacred work in small steps.

Rabbi Benji Stanley

Catherine da Costa



Plaque on Cromwell House, Highgate*

By the time the Jews were readmitted to England in 1656, the country had disposed of her monarchy and was a Commonwealth, under the rule of the Lord Protector, Oliver Cromwell. Most of these early Jews were Spanish-Portuguese immigrants, though some had remained after the banishment of 1290 as 'conversos' or Marranos - secret Jews. At the time of the Restoration in 1660, when Charles II became King, the community was growing, anxious to take its place as a stable part of the English religious spectrum.

Many of these seventeenth century Jews were related to one another, intermarrying within the group to prevent their heritage from dying out. One such was the Mendes family. Fernando Mendes was born in Portugal in 1647 and attended the medical faculty of Montpellier University, one of the oldest universities in Europe. He graduated in 1667, noting on his diploma that he came from Spain rather than Portugal, whose countrymen in France were often considered as Jews. He was never circumcised. He arrived in England in 1669. Fernando would have been too young to be a physician in Portugal. Catherine of Braganza came over to England in 1662. In 1678 he was appointed physician-in-ordinary to her - 'for good and faithful service' - and continued to care for the royal family for the rest of his life. He was later created a Fellow of the College of Physicians, and looked after the King in his last illness. Such a position necessitated his conforming to the Catholic religion - that of the Queen - but he later recognised his

Jewish ancestry. It was usual for Jews to take a Hebrew name as well as their given name, and Fernando Mendes later took the name Moses. He married Isabel Marques (who took the name Rachel). Mendes was paid a salary, and was provided with his own apartment in Somerset House, the Queen's royal palace in London. At a time of considerable anti-Catholic feeling, this was one of the few places in London where a Catholic might attend church. The Queen's influence on the da Costa family was probably the reason why these 'converso' Jews chose Catholicism rather than Protestantism for their new religion. They called their elder daughter Catherine, after the Queen, her godmother, and she was baptised at Somerset House, later taking the name Rachel, like her mother. The children of Moses and Rachel Mendes were brought up as Jews, as were their cousins, the children of Moses' first cousin Alvaro da Costa.

In 1675 Alvaro, a wealthy man, acquired Cromwell House in Highgate, the first Jewish-owned property in England since the readmission. The two families shared the house, although they both had houses in the city of London, and in 1698 Catherine married Alvaro's son Anthony. There is a note in Daniel Defoe's *A Tour through the Islands of Great Britain* that the Jews had particularly fixed on Highgate as their country retreat, that they lived there in style and had a kosher butcher and a synagogue. According to the plans, it is possible that the synagogue - almost certainly an informal one - was on the ground-floor of Cromwell House. It was not unusual for Jewish households to have their own synagogue. It has been suggested that there was a ritual bath or *mikveh* in the cellar, but there is no clear evidence for this. Catherine and Anthony were married in synagogue; this must have taken place either in the small synagogue in Creechurch Lane, as the Bevis Marks synagogue did not open until 1701, or more probably at home in Cromwell House.

Catherine as a young girl showed a talent for painting, the first known Jewish woman artist in England. She was introduced to Bernard Lens the younger, an artist in watercolours and a miniaturist. He was the third member of

the Lens family to achieve fame in the field of art, and was believed to be one of the first watercolourists to paint on ivory. Lens was later the miniature painter at the courts of George I and George II. Catherine copied as miniatures several of the most valued paintings in Britain, including works by Raphael, van Dyck and Rubens. She also painted full length portraits in watercolour. One of her father was shown at the Anglo-Jewish Historical Exhibition of 1887, and is now in the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue at Lauderdale Road; one of her son, Abraham aged ten, is in the Jewish Museum. Another charming portrait of two young children holding an orange is probably of her grandchildren.

Also living in Cromwell House was Alvaro's brother John and his family. John, who used the name Mendes da Costa, was one of the first, and the second biggest, investor in the Bank of England when it opened in 1695. John, too, had married within the Mendes family, and inherited a large dowry from his wife. The family was now one of the wealthiest in London, with other property in the City, and enjoyed the normal accomplishments of any figures in high society: horse riding, music, art and literature. Catherine's talent was an important feature of their family life.



Cromwell House, Highgate.

In the early years of the eighteenth century many apparently wealthy families found themselves in dire financial straits. The South Sea Bubble fiasco of 1720 brought low thousands of well-intentioned investors and John found himself ruined by the unwise dealings of his sons, Anthony, Alvaro and Abraham. His will states: 'I give and bequeath to each of them one guinea, by reason of their extravagancies'. Anthony, in particular,

who had married a Jewish heiress, dissipated her fortune, too, and was declared bankrupt.



Voltaire

However, one of the creditors who lost heavily in the affair, was the French literary figure, Voltaire. He came over to England in 1726, writing to a friend, 'At my coming to London I found my damned Jew was broken!'. Voltaire, at the age of thirty-two, was already a distinguished man of letters, though principally known for his poetry. He confronted Anthony, who spun a story about misfortune and their normal good faith. 'He moved me to tears,' Voltaire wrote later, 'I embraced him, we praised God together and I lost 80% of my money.'

Whatever the result of the bankruptcy proceedings, Voltaire was entertained frequently by the Mendes da Costa family. He seems to have become quite close to Catherine - all pictures of her (including her own) show her to be a beautiful young woman, and there is no doubt of her intelligence and artistic talent. He tells of an occasion when a cleric tried to convert her to Christianity. 'Was your God born a Jew?' she asked him. 'Yes' he replied. 'Did he live as a Jew?'



Catherine's son, Abraham, at age ten

'Yes.' 'Did he die as a Jew?' 'Yes'. Well then be a Jew yourself.'. This seems to be the sort of exchange to have taken place on a social occasion.

Certainly Catherine and Anthony, in spite of the bankruptcy, lived well, entertaining on a lavish scale. Anthony became the house's owner on his father's death in 1716 and continued to live there until he died in 1747. They had five children, four daughters and a son Abraham. One daughter Sara, married Ephraim Lópes Pereira d'Aguilar, 2nd Baron d'Aguilar, who lived at Starvation Farm in Islington (see *Westminster Quarterly*, October 1919). She was the grandmother of Lady Ashburton who built and lived in Kent House. The two other daughters converted and married into the English aristocracy.

Catherine da Costa died in 1756 and was buried in the Sephardi Nuevo (New) Jewish Cemetery in Mile End. She bequeathed her miniatures to her son Abraham for life, to be divided after his death between the rest of her family. Some are in the Amsterdam Jewish Historical Museum.



A pair of Chinese export armorial porcelain dinner plates, with the Mendes da Costa arms in the centre. Fernando Mendes's sister Leonora, Catherine's aunt, (who had been granted these arms in 1723) had married her first cousin Alvaro da Costa. Their son Moses (Anthony) became the husband of Catherine.

Philippa Bernard

We are grateful to member Peter Barber for drawing our attention to Catherine da Costa and for reviewing this article.

*The plaque was recently put up on Cromwell House to honour Catherine. It is part of a project initiated in 2019 in Highgate to commemorate the lives of prominent London women with pink plaques. These pink plaques provoked protests from feminist groups who felt that to use the colour pink for the plaques was to devalue the worth of the women. Catherine's plaque reads:

*CATHERINE DA COSTA (1678-1756)
English Jewish miniaturist and portrait painter, born in Somerset House, was named after Catherine of Braganza, and known as a 'blue stocking'. She was taught by the famous drawing master, Bernard Lens, tutor to the royal family*

A Special Message

As the first anniversary approaches, I want to remind myself of how grateful I am to God for all the many blessings in my life. Of course, the greatest, most miraculous and beautiful of all are my four children, two of whom have already gone to be with Him in paradise.

Through my children I am also blessed with being a part of this wonderful community. I will not ever underestimate the magnificent amount of love I felt at last year's memorial service and the outpouring of heartfelt words through the many beautiful notes of condolences. They were, as I desperately tried to tread water in those dark tempestuous seas with the swells threatening to engulf me, nothing less than a life-vest for me.

Your love as a community literally 'buoyed me up' and I will forever be grateful.

Angelina Linsey.

1657 The First Synagogue



The beautiful London Synagogue, known always by its street name of Bevis Marks, is often given credit for being the oldest in London after the Readmission of 1656. It is certainly the oldest still in use, but around the corner in the little winding road called Creechurch Lane was the first Synagogue used by the Spanish Portuguese Jews after they reappeared in England. The only indication of its whereabouts is the blue plaque high on the wall which reads: *Site of the First Synagogue after the Resettlement 1657-1701.*

The Synagogue at No. 5 was a tall private house taken with a lease for an initial term of twenty-one years at a rent of £40 per year. Synagogue services commenced in January 1657, using a *Sefer Torah* acquired earlier from Amsterdam. The next month, the community leased a piece of land in Mile End for use as a cemetery. The Synagogue entrance was protected by three double-locking doors. Two rooms on the first floor were reserved for prayer, the smaller was for the women, separated from the larger by a *mechitza*, a partition fitted with a long and narrow latticed window. In the larger room were four long benches, two on each side, for the male worshippers. The Wardens' box was a form of desk raised high above the other seats, and occupying the west end of the room. Six feet in front of it and on a slightly lower level was the *bimah* or reading-desk, with two steps on each side, and brass candlesticks at each corner. The Ark was little more than a plain cupboard flanked by large brass candlesticks. Two perpetually burning crystal lamps hung in front of it. The walls were fitted with drawers in which the worshippers kept their Prayer Books and *tallitim*. This

description is little different from many synagogues of today, but it was offered by a Christian visitor at the time, John Greenhalgh, who enlarged on his visit to describe the service and the worshippers.

Mr. Greenhalgh, a citizen of London, wanted to learn Hebrew, and was introduced to a Rabbi 'with a mighty bush beard', who gave him a pass to be admitted to the Synagogue. He describes the appearance of the men in large white vests hanging over their heads and shoulders. The women were richly dressed in silks and gold lace with muffs, sitting apart, behind a lattice. He himself was told to take his hat off, not being a Jew. He tells of rows of boxes, with ring pull handles, in which each Jew kept his veil (*tallit*) and his books, locked with a key. He was very impressed with the ceremony and with the music and said that all is 'sung with a mighty noise from first to last'.

Mr. Greenhalgh describes his conversation with the bearded Rabbi - there was some difficulty with the language as the Rabbi spoke little English, but was familiar with Latin.

What is interesting about this conversation is that Mr. Greenhalgh's Rabbi, Samuel Levi, came from Poland where he had attended the *Yeshiva*. Whereas the Synagogue and its congregation were for Spanish-Portuguese Jews (*Sephardim*), Rabbi Levi - from the tribe of the Levites, or prophets - and several other congregants were *Ashkenazim* from Eastern Europe. Levi may have been a *chazan*, *shochet* or other dignitary, as the first Rabbi is usually quoted as being Rabbi Moses Athias, a Sephardi Jew. It is usually assumed that until the founding of the Great Synagogue, for the 'Tedescos' or German-speaking Jews, London's Jewry were all *Sephardim*, but clearly the Synagogue was open to Jews of both kinds.

The congregation also had a clerk, Senor Mordecai, and a special physician, Dr. Bueno. The existence of the latter was probably in conjunction with care for the communal poor. That there were poor Jews in London we know from the Will of Antonio Carvajal, who became the first endenized English Jew, in which a sum of £30 was bequeathed for their relief. Jewish beggars had indeed been numerous

in London for some years. Descriptions of this part of London in other accounts of the City show it to have been a dirty, infested part of the capital, thronged with criminals and down-and-outs of all kinds. As Jews were not permitted to live within the City boundary it was almost inevitable that the first synagogues should have occupied the poorer areas.

Mr. Greenhalgh was impressed by the decorum. He mentions in particular the Ruler (or lay leader) who was apparently a wealthy merchant - 'a big, black, fierce and stern man' - who when any of those present left singing upon their books and talked, or some were out of tune, he did call aloud with a barbarous thundering voice and knocked upon the high desk with his fist. The entire service was carried out in Hebrew which to this end they do industriously teach all their children from their infancy.'

This English visitor could see the prayer books 'all in Hebrew but without points' and his description of the reading of the Torah follows exactly the ritual used in most synagogues today. The Ark was opened and the Scroll taken out. A member of the congregation read a blessing and another chanted the portion. However, he notes that 'when there is any mention of the Edomites, the Philistines or any enemies of Israel, those present stamp their feet loudly!'

Apparently Mr. Greenhalgh was very distressed by his visit, remembering the history of the Jews - 'I was strangely, uncouthly, unaccustomedly moved, and deeply affected; tears stood in my eyes to see those banished Sons of Israel, standing in their ancient garb (veiled) but in a strange land solemnly and carefully looking East towards their own country.'

He later visited again, this time at Purim, with of course 'a great knocking and stamping when Haman is named'. He found that in the congregation, about a hundred were present, all seemed to be of the merchant class - no 'mechanicals'! - and obviously wealthy judging by the clothes of the women and the jewels worn by the men.

Another visitor to Creechurch Lane - perhaps better known - was Samuel Pepys. He was less impressed, attending a service

JOBS PEOPLE DO

with his wife. He too mentions the layout of the Synagogue, the men wearing 'veils' and the women sitting apart. His wife was not very happy about this, as she found herself separated from her husband, and in such a strange environment. Pepys describes the Scrolls being taken from the Ark and handed round from one member of the congregation to another, to the sound of loud singing and joyous chanting. What Pepys had not realised was that this visit took place on *Simchat Torah*, when the congregation celebrates the occasion with noise and excitement. So it is hardly surprising that the diarist writes, 'But, Lord! to see the disorder, laughing, sporting, and no attention, but confusion in all their service, more like brutes than people knowing the true God, would make a man forswear ever seeing them more and indeed I never did see so much, or could have imagined there had been any religion in the whole world so absurdly performed as this.' A very different view from Mr. Greenhalgh's appreciation of good decorum.



Samuel Pepys

It was not until 1701 that the splendid new building in Bevis Marks opened for the Spanish-Portuguese community, leaving the little Synagogue in Creechurch Lane which had served it well for nearly fifty years.

Philippa Bernard

Trauma Coach



I am a Trauma Coach who guides people back from challenging times to leading fulfilling lives, where they are fully in control. Trauma coaching sounds severe but we all view our problems in varying degrees of 'severity'. I lead my clients through a journey of enlightenment by encouraging and guiding them to self-discover, which enables them to grow. I am a certified NLP coach and am accredited through 'The Coaching Society', 'Comensa,' 'International Coaches Register' and the 'International Institute of Coaching & Mentoring (IIC & M). I overcame a terrible car accident, which led me to want to help people going through very challenging times.

The way I help my clients is to uncover what they truly want to achieve while identifying the 'diversions' they have set for themselves. I identify their current perspectives with them and we formulate time-based goals, for which they are accountable. We all sometimes get to a point in our lives where we feel that nothing we are doing works and we can't seem to shift a certain view that we have about ourselves. I help people who have run out of ideas on how they can change their focus from the self-inflicted barriers that they have subconsciously created, and this identification is the image of who they think they really are. Through self-image conditioning we reshape the way we look at our mind-sets, our points of view and ourselves.

There is a famous quote that I love that goes 'The mass of men live lives with quiet desperation' by David Thoreau. Although this quote may seem a bit dire, it relates to a lot of people around us. Among these people, there are some who show their despair openly and usually adopt a victim mentality. Others on the

other hand, go on living their lives while trying to hide how they really feel about something, by showing a contented appearance which is a charade. This leads me to the saying - *Better the devil you know than the devil you don't* - implying that it is better to deal with a difficult situation that one knows, than with a new situation that could be worse.

We all have choice in life and are all in control of our destinies. However, it is always easier to allow ourselves to indulge in forms of escapism that help to conceal the unhappiness we can sometimes feel. These mental diversions are negative and are addictive as they allow us to 'escape' from the perceived unpleasant or banal aspects of daily life.

The key to living positively is to be in control of it by not focusing on what you do not have and not allowing yourself to become envious of things that others have. We have to avoid elements of despair and focus on what we are lucky to have. We must not get distracted by the plethora of never-ending choices all around us and we must be aware when comparison engulfs the impression we have of ourselves.

It is important that we practise willpower and develop an awareness of what we want to change in our lives. We must then come up with routines and strategies, so that we are not distracted by cues and triggers that lead us on to the wrong path - such as addictions to alcohol or shopping.

I maximise my clients' potentials by reviewing their progress and goals, holding them accountable for how far they have come or making them aware of what they have or haven't achieved. Once my clients have adapted their new routines and have accepted their new 'viewpoints', they reshape their beliefs about themselves. This new belief system is crucial and enables them to live confidently, knowing who they are. I get immense satisfaction from seeing my clients become energised and renewed through their journey of self-discovery.

How well do you know yourself...?
www.daniellowcoaching.com

Daniel Low

Scroll MST #740



Olomouc Synagogue

By the time that 1,564 Torah Scrolls arrived at Westminster Synagogue in 1964, very little remained of their former Jewish community in Czechoslovakia, now the Czech Republic. Most synagogues had been destroyed and much of the community had perished in the concentration camps. Many of these precious Scrolls were repaired and sent on to synagogues and organisations across the world. Each was numbered so that its journey could be traced and the Czech Memorial Trust at Kent House could be kept informed of its new life in another land.

One Scroll, MST#740, went to the Peninsula Sinai Congregation in Foster City, California, but that was not to be the end of its adventures. The Scroll had originally come from the city of Olomouc in Moravia. It is the sixth largest city in the country and the most important city in the Haná region. Until the mid-seventeenth century, Olomouc could be considered one of Moravia's capital cities. Olomouc's first Jewish residents settled there in the eleventh century and numbered around 2,500 before the Second World War. Only one tenth returned after the Holocaust, and many left again when the Communists took control of the country. Just a few dozen Jews remained.

The Synagogue had been torched by fascists in March 1939. Although the building was not entirely destroyed, it was later demolished by the Nazis and during the Communist era statues of Stalin and Lenin stood in its place. It was rebuilt with the help of the international Jewish community, and is now the third largest in the Czech

Republic after Prague and Brno. It has 162 members. There are regular Shabbat and festival services, and the Synagogue also has a kosher kitchen and a community centre.

The Chairman of the Memorial Scrolls Trust, Jeffrey Ohrenstein, was approached by a member of the Olomouc Synagogue who knew that the Scroll - which was one of two that had originally been used by his community - had been rescued and taken to London. He asked if it could be returned to its former home. This was a most unusual request. The Scroll's new home in California, The Peninsula Sinai congregation, was consulted and was generous in its reaction. It had recently spent two years restoring the Scroll but its members felt that it would be a *mitzvah* to accede to the Olomouc community's request. Not only did they agree to have the Scroll made kosher for its new orthodox home but they raised enough money for its journey. More than \$11,000 was raised. Community members were asked for donations to fund a word, a verse, a chapter, a *bar-* or *bat-mitzvah* portion — or even an entire book of the Torah.

the last letters were restored and the Scroll was festively installed

At a ceremony on 22nd October 2017, the last letters were restored and the Scroll was festively installed in the Jewish prayer room on the occasion of the Jewish Culture Days in Olomouc. It was the first Torah returned out of the 1,500 Bohemian and Moravian scrolls that are stored outside the Czech Republic.

When Scroll #740 reached Olomouc and regained its place in the Holy Ark it was greeted by members of Peninsula Sinai with their Rabbi Corey Helfand, together with the Trust's Jeffrey Ohrenstein. Rabbi Helfand said, 'Restoring the scroll and returning it to its home means the Holocaust is not just a memory, but that there is new life. It's like rekindling the light, in a way, to know Jewish life didn't end there.'

That is not the end of the story. In 2015

Peter Briess, whose family came from Olomouc, published a book about the Jews of the city. He called it *The House That Saved Us*. The Briess family, along with other Jews living in Olomouc, the capital of Moravia, enjoyed a comfortable life. Ignaz Briess was the founding father of a prosperous business dealing in pulses and grains, and was well known in the district. His son Theodore (known as Dori) was Peter's grandfather.

In 1935, Hans Briess, the son of Dori, felt confident and wealthy enough to build a splendid house in the centre of Olomouc. Few of the Jews living in the city felt much concerned about the growing atmosphere of fear and suspicion now felt in Germany. Jewish life continued much as usual and the Briess family were comfortable in their new home. The house was divided into two large apartments, with a smaller flat in the basement. Peter's grandparents lived on the ground floor, with the next generation occupying the first floor. In the basement lived Anezka, the housekeeper, a wonderful cook.

After the Austrian *Anschluss* of 1938, the Jews of Olomouc began to worry about their future. If this could happen to Austria what might befall their own country? Early in 1939 the Briess family began to make plans to leave for England, where they had relatives. The Germans moved into Czechoslovakia on 15th March.

A few weeks later there was a knock on the front door of the new house. 'The Commandant wishes to live in your house,' was the demand. Hans had the sense to take advantage of the situation. 'Yes', he told the German officer, 'he may have the house if he signs an exit visa for those who live there.' In a few weeks the Briess family were on their way. They wanted to go to Australia but England had to be the first port of arrival. Peter's grandparents were left behind; they went to live in Anezka's little house not far away. Hans died of natural causes and his wife was sent to Terezin and then to Auschwitz. If it had not been for the grand house that Hans Briess built in Olomouc, the Briess family would undoubtedly have perished.

Charity Organisations Two Mental Health Charities



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BEYOND SHAME BEYOND STIGMA

Jami is the specialist provider of mental health services in the Jewish community.

Everyone's experience of mental illness is different. The organisation provides practical and emotional support for everyone affected by a mental health problem; the person with the diagnosis, a friend, a relative or an employer. At any one time, Jami is supporting around 1,300 people - and reaching thousands more through community education.

Mental health recovery doesn't always refer to the process of complete recovery in the way we may recover from a physical health problem. So social workers and occupational therapists are there to support people towards recovery, and to help them to maintain their independence. Jami uses peer support workers with their own experience of mental ill health, to reinforce this message, offering hope and social inclusion. Within the organisation, there are community hubs and outreach, education and training and bespoke recovery support plans - all of which are enabling people to lead a meaningful life despite severe mental ill health. The education programme builds awareness, increases understanding and aims to put an end to stigma and discrimination.

The education and training covers courses in mental health first aid, enabling adults to be first aiders so that, in the event of a physical emergency, they know how to respond and how to support a person in distress.

There is a particular focus on student wellbeing because, whilst new challenges may be exciting, some students discover that the transition from the school environment to further education may not be a smooth one. Jami has formed a

partnership with the Union of Jewish Students and the University Jewish Chaplaincy, in Jewish student communities in Birmingham, Bristol and Leeds - a partnership which they hope to expand to other areas.

Stress is ever present in our lives. Well-managed, it can motivate but sometimes it can be overwhelming. Jami teaches the best way to cope with stress. Skills are needed if one is to be helpful to vulnerable people, those who may need support at difficult times in their life. Jami runs courses to teach these skills. Information on these courses is available at info@jamiuk.org



Jonny Benjamin MBE

Last February, as part of Mental Health Awareness Shabbat, Westminster Synagogue was pleased and proud to welcome Jonny Benjamin MBE who talked about his own experience of, and recovery from, mental illness. The event took place after a special Friday evening Shabbat Service and was well attended. Following a short break for light refreshment, Jonny spoke well and openly, and was happy to answer questions and to discuss the meaning of mental illness.

He is the joint founder, with Neil Laybourn, of **Beyond Shame Beyond Stigma**, a new mental health charity which is dedicated to breaking down walls surrounding young people's mental health. The primary objectives are reducing suicides, self-harm and stigma, by improving and enhancing mental health support and information for young people, their families and educators. Jonny recently visited Clore Shalom School where he spoke to pupils, parents and teachers.

Jonny and Neil first came to prominence following their award-winning Channel 4 documentary, *The Stranger on the Bridge*, which followed Jonny's journey to find Neil, who years earlier had talked him down from a bridge when he was suicidal.

After the pair were re-united, they began sharing their inspiring story across the UK and the rest of the world. The two of them have created conferences, written books and even run marathons together in aid of mental health and suicide prevention.

Jonny and Neil's latest endeavour, **Beyond Shame Beyond Stigma**, has been set up to support young people, their families and educators. It aims to provide the help which is currently lacking in mental health provision, by giving grants to organisations and charities that work with young people, their families and educators.

Three-quarters of all mental health issues begin in adolescence and yet many young people do not get the help they require. Jonny's own mental health issues started at the age of ten and he firmly believes that if he had received the appropriate intervention early on, he would not have ended up on the edge of the bridge where he met Neil at the age of twenty.

According to the Centre for Mental Health, the average wait for effective mental health treatment in the UK is ten years: 'It can take a decade for many young people to receive help after showing first symptoms. Opportunities to help are often missed until they reach "crisis", causing children to self-harm and become suicidal.'

Both these organisations are doing valuable work, with Jami providing essential training and **Beyond Shame, Beyond Stigma** raising funds to enable charities such as Jami to continue this essential service.

Claire Connick

Sholem Asch (1880-1957)



Apart from his distinction as a great Yiddish writer, Sholem Asch is particularly important to Westminster Synagogue as he was the father of Ruth Shaffer, for many years the director of the Czech Memorial Scrolls project. His father, Moshe, married twice, first to Rude with whom he had six or seven children, and then to Frajda, to whom another ten children were born.

The Asch family were poor Chasidic Jews, living in Kutno in Poland, and Moshe made his living as an innkeeper and a cattle dealer. He saw to it that his sons (Sholem was the fourth of Frajda's children) had a traditional upbringing, and Sholem, the brains of the family, went to the best *yeshiva*, his father hoping that he would become a rabbi. He duly studied the *Talmud*, together with Bible and religious studies. In 1899 he went to Warsaw, and in 1900 he published his highly praised first story - written in Hebrew. On the advice of the Yiddish writer I.L. Peretz, he subsequently decided to write only in Yiddish, the language spoken at home, and began an outstanding literary career in a language hardly known outside the Jews of Eastern Europe or the immigrants of America.

Although he was brought up in almost entirely Jewish surroundings, with little access to the outside world, Sholem showed, from his early youth, an interest in the more worldly changes going on around him. In secret he examined the ideas of the enlightenment reaching out beyond the closed Jewish learning of his family and his country. His parents

discovered his propensity for a new way of thinking, and disapproving of his attempts to break free of Chasidic tradition, sent him away to relatives where he earned a poor living as a Hebrew teacher. He himself felt that the rabbinate was not for him and anxious for a more liberal education moved away to a small village where he wrote letters for poor illiterate Jews, experiencing the miserable side of life which he always believed stood him in good stead when he began writing about his fellow Jews.

He returned to Warsaw, not to the restricted circumstances of the *yeshiva*, but to the modern views of the *Haskalah*, the Jewish enlightenment. He was writing short stories, now in Yiddish, and became part of a group of young Jewish writers, including I.L. Peretz, the Yiddish writer. Asch's work reflected the poverty and deprivation he suffered in company with his Warsaw friends. Peretz assisted these young men where he could, and was able to gain exemption from military service for Asch, whose first book of short stories, *In a Shlekter tsayt* (In a Bad Time) was published in 1902 to much acclaim.

In 1903 Asch was introduced to the well-to-do Hebrew teacher and poet Menaḥem Mendel Shapiro, met his family and married his daughter Mathilde. The marriage brought Asch a measure of financial security, enabling him to devote himself wholly to writing. From short stories, including several based on his family life in the *stetl*, he now turned to drama and his first play, *Tsurikgekumen* (Coming Back), was published, to be followed by *Got fun nekome* (God of Vengeance) which he wrote while living in Cologne.

It is about a Jewish brothel owner who attempts to become respectable by commissioning a *Torah* scroll and marrying off his daughter to a *yeshiva* student. Set in the brothel, the play includes Jewish prostitutes and a lesbian scene. Peretz famously said of the play after reading it: 'Burn it, Asch, burn it!' Instead, Asch went to Berlin to pitch it to director Max Reinhardt and actor Rudolf Schildkraut, who produced it, in German, at the Deutsches Theater. *God of Vengeance* opened on March 19, 1907

and ran for six months; soon it was translated and performed in a dozen European languages. The New York production sparked a major press war between local Yiddish papers, led by the Orthodox *Tageblatt* and the radical *Forverts*. Orthodox papers referred to *God of Vengeance* as 'filthy', 'immoral,' and 'indecent', while radical papers described it as 'moral', 'artistic' and 'beautiful'. Some of the more provocative scenes in the production were changed, but it wasn't enough for the Orthodox papers.

Even Yiddish intellectuals and the play's supporters had problems with its portrayal of Jewish tradition, especially the use of the *Torah*, which they said Asch seemed to be using mostly for cheap effects. The association of Jews and sex work was a popular stereotype at the time. *God of Vengeance* came to Broadway in an English translation in 1923, but charges of obscenity closed it after a few weeks; after an appeal the charges were dropped.



Asch (standing) with fellow writers at a conference in 1908

In 1908 Asch attended a conference in the city of Czernowitz in Ukraine, together with several other distinguished Yiddish writers. The conference proclaimed Yiddish a modern language with a developing high culture. The organisers of this gathering expressed a sense of urgency to the delegates that Yiddish as a language and as the binding glue of Jews throughout Eastern Europe needed help. They proclaimed that the status of Yiddish reflected the status of the Jewish people. Thus, only by saving the language could the Jews as a people be saved from the onslaught of assimilation. The conference for the first time in history declared Yiddish to be 'a national language of the Jewish people'. Speaking in support of Peretz and the

central place in Jewish life of the Yiddish language, Asch's personal contribution was a paper in which he argued for more Yiddish translations of Hebrew literary treasures, and he himself translated the *Book of Ruth* as an example.

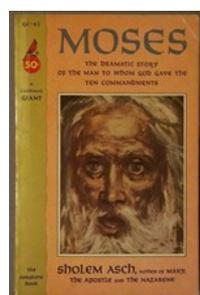
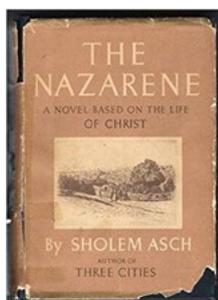
In the same year Asch visited Palestine for the first time, and then went to America, moving there with his family in 1914 to escape the violence against Jews in Europe. He settled on Staten Island and began to write for the Yiddish daily *Forverts*. By now he was producing novels, plays and some poetry, appealing to non-Jewish Americans as well as the rapidly-growing Jewish population of America.

In his long novel *Meri* (Mary) and its sequel *Der veg tsu zikh* (The Route to Oneself), he directly confronted contemporary social and political issues, in this case the 1905 Russian Revolution. For the first time in Yiddish literature, Asch portrayed the wealthy Jewish elite of Saint Petersburg side by side with the poverty-stricken workers of Ukraine. These two novels, while sympathetic to workers, nevertheless showed that Asch was estranged from their struggle. Basically conservative, he depicted the revolution as a movement fundamentally hostile to Jews, who were, in his view, forever different from gentiles, even at the most cataclysmic moments of history. The two novels were the first of a series in which Asch began representing the whole panorama of Jewish life in Eastern Europe, past and present.

He was now beginning to play an active role in public life, helping in Jewish relief work, and became a founding member of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. He visited Lithuania to help the Jews there, but was overwhelmed by what he found, suffering a nervous breakdown. In 1923 he returned to Poland and then went to Paris, while still continuing to write for the American-Yiddish papers. He was also a part of the artistic circle of Jewish painters, including Marc Chagall.

It was while he was in Warsaw that he began what was to become perhaps his best known work, the three-volume *Farn mabl* (Before the Flood), in scope and treatment a work of major importance

that, translated into several languages, consolidated his international reputation. Written and published in stages between 1921 and 1931, *Farn mabl* was translated into English in 1933 by Edwin and Willa Muir under the title *Three Cities*. This panoramic tale is told in three parts, each bearing the name of a city central to events immediately prior to, and during, the Russian Revolution of 1917: Petersburg, Warsaw and Moscow. Asch depicted everything through the eyes of his hero Zachary Mirkin, the only son of an enormously rich merchant. *Petersburg* examines the way entrepreneurial Jews contrived to share in the great commercial and industrial expansion of the turn of the century, rising to positions of power and prestige in the dying days of Tsarism. *Warsaw*, by contrast, sympathetically depicts the poverty and political turmoil that made the Russian revolution inevitable, while *Moscow* attempts to analyse the destructive social forces unleashed by the revolution and the subsequent conflict between individual freedom and the rule of the Bolshevik party.



Asch continued to produce a vast outpouring of novels on different themes. He was always troubled by the differences between Jews and Christians, culminating in his trilogy *Der man fun natseres* (The Nazarene), the story of Jesus as a Jew, which brought him accusations of conversion, and as a result he was dropped by the proprietors of *Forverts* with suggestions of promoting Christianity.

He also earned the attention of the House Committee on Un-American Activities for writing for a Communist newspaper. Like others who fell foul of Senator McCarthy, Asch and his wife decided to leave America in 1953, coming to London to be



Scene from the original production of 'God of Vengeance'

near their daughter (Ruth Shaffer), with homes in Israel and continental Europe.

Continuing to write almost to the end, Sholem Asch died in London in 1957, at his desk in his home in St. John's Wood. He was buried at Hoop Lane Jewish Cemetery. Members of the Association of Jewish Journalists and Authors, of which Sholem Asch was a co-founder, mounted a guard of honour. At a Memorial Service at the West London Synagogue, Rabbi Harold Reinhart gave the address.

Sholem Asch used figures he knew well to illustrate his work. His father greatly influenced his writing, particularly his love of humanity and his concern for Jewish/Christian relations. He was especially anxious to present Jewish life in all its facets, both in history and in his own time. His work has done much to bring the Yiddish language to the forefront of Jewish life, in all its colour, humanity and realism.

Philippa Bernard

Murder Most Foul!



Chief Constable Henry Solomon (1794-1844)

In the history of ghost hunting in this country, there can be very few Jewish ghosts. But one is believed to haunt the old cells of the Brighton police force, now located in the Police Museum in the basement of Brighton Town Hall. This spectre is that of the first - and still the only - Jewish Chief Constable in the British Police Force, Henry Solomon, who commanded the Brighton Force from 1833 until his violent death in 1844.

Solomon, born in 1794, was originally a watchmaker in London, but moved to Brighton in 1821 where he decided on a life of public service. He was appointed Inspector of Nuisances, whose job was to inspect for offensive conditions (known as nuisances) that were in breach of the law: bad sanitary conditions, smells, privies, gutters, refuse heaps etc. He also distributed chemicals to ensure houses with smallpox were disinfected. He then became Inspector of Gas Lights, and not long after Brighton established its first Police Force, he became its Chief Constable, the highest rank in the force, and a most unusual appointment for a Jew. It was a small force, only thirty-one officers for a population of some 47,000 souls.

Henry, a vice-president of Brighton Synagogue, married into a well-known Brighton Jewish family; his wife was the daughter of Emanuel Hyam Cohen and they had nine children. Cohen, originally of Munich, is thought to have been the main force in establishing the Jewish community in Brighton in about 1782. He was an educated man and an educator. He kept a sea-side boys' boarding school, in Artillery Place, a sort of institution that was quite common at the time. Henry

therefore was known and much respected in the town.

On 13th March 1844 a prisoner was brought before Henry Solomon to be interviewed about a crime. John Lawrence, aged 23, was suspected of having stolen a roll of carpet from a shop in St. James's Street in the town. Apparently Lawrence was a little simple-minded - one report referred to him as a reckless vagabond - and began to show signs of becoming agitated, jumping up from his seat. Solomon tried to calm him down, suggesting that he sit for a moment by the fire blazing in the grate. But Lawrence lost all control, grabbed the poker from the fireplace and struck the policeman over the head with it. Three other policemen were in the room at the time, but they could not prevent the attack and the Chief Constable was fatally wounded.

Doctors quickly rushed to the scene where they attempted to revive him. He was taken to his home in Prince's Street, but he died the following morning.

Lawrence made no attempt to escape and was duly tried for murder at the local assizes. It is interesting to note - in view of the small Sussex Jewish population - that three Jurors were excused service at the trial at Lewes on the grounds of their Jewish faith. The local paper, the *Brighton Gazette*, gave graphic details of the trial, when a constable who had been present, gave his evidence. "The prisoner darted behind me, took a poker from the fireplace and struck Mr. Solomon.". The poker was produced, bent at an angle of 20°. The witness continued, "Mr. Solomon had no hat on. I took the poker from the prisoner. He said, "I don't mind - I have done it and I hope they will hang me for it.". Mr. Solomon did not speak - he was insensible. He fell bleeding to the floor.'. There was no doubt about the outcome of the trial; Lawrence was found guilty and sentenced to death. He was hanged on 6th April at Horsham before a large crowd.

Henry Solomon was buried in the Brighton Jewish Burial Ground in Florence Place. His standing in the town was such that thousands turned out to watch his coffin carried to the cemetery.

His tombstone reads:-

Fifteen Years chief officer of police of the town of Brighton who was brutally murdered while in the public discharge of the duties of his office on the 14th day of March 1844 in the fiftieth year of his age.

A fund was set up to provide for his wife and children, raising over £1,000. Queen Victoria herself contributed £50.

The Chief Constable is believed to have been the only such officer to have been murdered in his own police station. He is fondly remembered in the town of Brighton. The municipal bus company commemorated some of its leading citizens on the front of its fleet of buses. Among such distinguished names as the Prince Regent, Rudyard Kipling, Ivy Compton Burnett and Ida Lupino, Henry Solomon takes an honourable place.

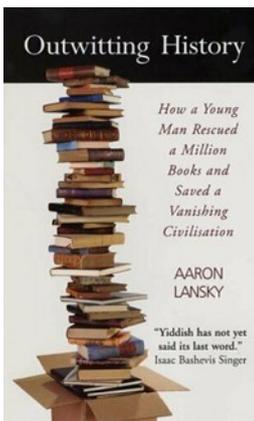


In 2014 a blue plaque dedicated to Henry Solomon was unveiled in Brighton.

Brighton's current Chief Constable performed the

ceremony, joined by representatives of the police and the Jewish community at the old Jewish cemetery where he is buried. Giles York, the present Chief Constable of Brighton, referred to Solomon as 'a generous and compassionate police officer, true to his faith and true to his office.' Rabbi Hershel Radar recited a memorial prayer and read the inscription on the headstone. Godfrey Gould, former chair of the Sussex branch of the Jewish Historical Society, said that Solomon 'represented all that is good in the Jewish community in Brighton and Hove and the UK generally. He was an integral part of the local community, an elder, a trustee and the vice-president.'





Outwitting History

How a Young Man Rescued a Million Books and Saved a Vanishing Civilisation.
by
Aaron Lansky

Souvenir Press
2005

By an extraordinary twist of fate, Aaron Lansky became the founder of the National Yiddish Book Centre. In this book he recounts the strange and sometimes hilarious events which led up to the establishment of the important repository which now has some thirty-five thousand members.

The fascinating memoir tells of a rescue mission of gigantic proportions; an adventure story of last-minute deals and perilous journeys to save thousands and thousands of Yiddish books. At the start of the story, scholars believed that only 70,000 such volumes remained. When he began his rescue work most Jewish leaders dismissed his plan, telling him that Yiddish was a dead language

He was only twenty-three when, in 1980, he received a late-night telephone call from someone who had taught him Yiddish when he was a teenager at Summer School. The caller told him that he had seen a huge number of Yiddish books in a rubbish skip, in pouring rain, and that they needed rescuing immediately.

What prompted this young man to agree to leave the warmth of his home in the middle of the night, bully his rusty old and long-abandoned truck into life, drive to the station and catch a night train to New York to meet a friend whom he had telephoned, we shall never know, and I doubt he himself knows. Suffice it to say, that it was the beginning of a life-long dedication to the rescuing and preservation of Yiddish books. He and his friend, who had been joined by another couple, worked through the rest of that night - getting soaked in the process - and

managed to save many of the precious volumes.

From that time, he gradually became well-known amongst elderly Jews, who had not known what to do with their beloved tomes. He was overwhelmed with hundreds of calls, offering him vast collections of Yiddish books.

As his work gathered impetus, it was at the same time, slowed by the old people just wanting to load him with coffee and cake in order to keep him talking. Instead of being able to pick up a bundle and move on to the next contributor, he had the experience of being unable to get away without a long time spent with each donor. He found the visits to be aggravating, fascinating and rewarding in almost equal measure.

his adventures during the intervening years are moving, amusing, gripping and astonishing by turns

His home became impossibly overloaded, as did that of his parents, with old books piled from floor to ceiling. He was obliged to take warehouse space to accommodate his ever-increasing collection. He tells how, over time, he was able to raise sufficient funds enabling him to establish the unique National Yiddish Book Centre.

The tales of his adventures during the intervening years are moving, amusing, gripping and astonishing by turns. Although this book was published over a decade ago, it is still available and very entertaining. I heartily recommend it.

Claire Connick

Editorial

What strange times we are experiencing. Who would have imagined that we would be 'attending' Shabbat Services by 'Zoom' and that our Rabbis would be taking the Services from their own homes? We are all becoming quite sophisticated in our use of electronic connections. There have been online cookery demonstrations* and lectures, of a high professional standard, by our own members. The ability to attend discussions and classes is a very valuable asset and we congratulate and thank every one of the wonderful people who are setting up and managing it all.

We have been touched by the way volunteers from the congregation have contacted others to see if they needed anything and just to chat. Isolation is one of the worst trials of people who live alone.

With the death of Hugh Sassoon, we have lost a special Founder Member of our Synagogue who was a tower of strength at its inception and for many years after. He maintained his interest in the congregation and its affairs to the end of his life, advising on matters of finance - and always asking searching questions at the Annual General Meetings!

We are finding many ways of occupying ourselves during the crisis. With more time on our hands, some of us are turning our gardens into delightful places to relax - exchanging photographs of our handiwork. Others are putting pictures on line of places where they have managed to walk.

On Thursday nights we have faced our neighbours while we clapped the NHS. Some of these neighbours, who had never really met, are now the best of friends, exchanging recipes across the street, and cooperating on deliveries of groceries. England's reputation for being reserved and unfriendly has disappeared. It is highly likely that the nation will have been changed for ever when we return to 'normal'.

*You can see Claudia Golden's Sfongato demo on YouTube.

The Jews of Sardinia



The history of the Jews in Sardinia can be traced over two millennia - they were Sephardic Jews of Spanish and Italian descent. The first recorded notes of these Jews occurred in the year 19 CE. Little Jewish history of early Sardinia remains but it is presumed that they led a quiet, provincial life with full rights.

The first facts about the Jews in Sardinia come to us from Flavius Josephus - born Joseph ben Matityahu. This first-century Roman-Jewish scholar recorded in his study *Antiquities* that in 19 CE, four thousand Jews were deported to Sardinia from Rome by the Emperor Tiberius. Flavius noted with sadness that the emperor 'punished so many' for the 'crimes of the few.' These 'few' were four villains who persuaded a senator's wife - a convert to Judaism - to invest large sums of money in a non-existent synagogue, which these crooks claimed to represent. The Emperor had hoped that the Jews would perish in Sardinia. Instead, the numerous descendants of the exiles built a prosperous life for themselves and became indispensable to the Island's rulers - in trade, finance, money lending, crafts, and medicine.

After the fall of Rome in 476, a succession of foreign rulers became the governors of Sardinia and life for the Jews became increasingly harsh. During those times, mob violence against the Jews was recorded. Sardinia is one of the few places in Italy where there are catacombs containing Jewish inscriptions. The catacombs on the Island of Sant'Antioco date from the fourth and fifth centuries. The inscriptions are in a form of Hebrew-Latin.

From the time of the establishment of a native government in Sardinia in 665 to that of the annexation of the Island to

Aragon in 1325 only a few incidents in the life of the Jewish communities are known. Antonio di Tharros, a Sardinian historian from the eighth century, and Delotone, a compiler of poems for the Sardinian King Gialeto, mention two Jewish scholars from Cagliari - Abraham and Canaim, stating that these men deciphered the Phoenician inscriptions collected by Gialeto, as well as the Greek and Phoenician inscriptions found in the palace of Masu. The Sardinian chronicler Severino relates that the Synagogue of Cagliari, which was situated in the quarter called Aliama, was destroyed in 790, by a fire which was generally attributed to the malevolence of some fanatical Christians.

During the early centuries, the fate of the Jews in Sardinia resembled that of their brethren in other Roman provinces. So long as pagans ruled the empire, the Jews possessed full rights of citizenship, but as Christianity became the dominant power these rights were curtailed.

From the middle of the fifth to the middle of the seventh century, Sardinia was governed first by the Vandals and then by the Goths, and the condition of the Jews was reasonably stable. There were communities in Oristano, Lula, Gallura, Nora, Sinai (probably founded by Jews), Canahim, Sulcis, Tharros, Alghero, Colmedia, and the capital, Cagliari. Their numbers were greatly augmented by the arrival of new settlers from Barcelona, Majorca and other places.

However, towards the end of the sixth century, a disturbing incident occurred in Cagliari. A converted Jew, named Peter, placed images of saints in the Synagogue on Easter Monday. The Jews lodged a complaint with Pope Gregory the Great, who ordered Bishop Januarius of Cagliari to have the images removed immediately.

In 1325, Sardinia fell under the rule of the Spanish Kingdom of Aragon. For the first century during Spanish rule, life was quite good for the Jews. During this time Spanish Jews began to arrive and settle the Island. Then, in 1484 and again in 1485, the Jews of Marseille, fleeing violence, led to an exodus of some 200 Jewish families from the city, settling in

Sardinia. And, in 1485, the Jews of Sardinia were declared to be the property of the King of Aragon and were governed by his authority alone.

The Jews of Alghero often showed their loyalty to the Aragonese kings. In 1370, they contracted many debts in order to supply King Pedro with money and provisions for his armies. In token of his gratitude, the latter forbade their creditors to claim repayment within two years.

In the capital, Cagliari, there was a large synagogue. This synagogue was eventually forcibly converted into the Roman Catholic Church of Santa Croce. The largest Jewish community in Sardinia was in the city of Alghero. Many Jewish families were engaged in trade and other respected professions such as banking and medicine. While life was good for the Jews in Alghero, the Jews living in other Sardinian cities endured increasing intolerance. This included the establishment of Jewish ghettos and special identifying clothing - as well as forced baptism. Jewish immigration to Sardinia was halted under pain of death. A decree issued in 1481 fixed the penalties for an offence against Christianity and for the employment of Christian servants.

In 1492, under the Alhambra Decree, the Spanish crown ordered the expulsion of Jews in Spain. Sardinia is also mentioned in the Inquisition records pertaining to a population of Marranos.

While the Jews of Alghero were mostly engaged in trade, there were also many scholars and physicians among them. The best known were: Isaac Eymies (who received a pension from the governor of Lugodoro and from the city of Alghero, and who, in 1406 was promoted to the post of city physician of Cagliari); Ḥayyim of Hipre (author of a work on the medicinal plants of Sardinia); and Solomon Avernoques (who was renowned for his surgical operations). The Jews of Alghero were not excluded from official positions. Mention is made of a Jew named Moses Sofer who, in 1467, occupied the position of tax-collector. Another, named Moses di Carcassona, was appointed as the general sheriff's officer of the court of Alghero.

He lent large sums for the equipment of the navy and of the armies which had been led by the Vice-King Ximene Perez to the city of Oristano.

It seems that before the Spanish domination, Alghero contained only a few Jews, who had neither a synagogue nor a separate cemetery. It was only at the end of the fourteenth century that these institutions were founded. In 1381, Vitali Alabi bought a house situated on a street leading to the castle, from Giacomo Bassach and his wife, intending to use it as a synagogue. Two years later Francisco Giovanni of Santa Colombia, governor of Sassari and Lugodoro, and later vice-king of Sardinia, permitted the physician Solomon Averonques to buy any place he might choose for a cemetery.

In 1455 a petition was addressed to the municipality by the Jewish administrators Terocio, Buria, and Giacoble Nathan to allow them to enlarge the Jewish cemetery. Like all the communities of Sardinia, that of Alghero was administered by elected directors or secretaries, who possessed judicial power in all litigations between Jews, and even between Jews and Christians (when sums not exceeding five livres were involved).



The renaming of the Piazza

However, while the Jews of Alghero were, for unknown reasons, the object of government solicitude and enjoyed a high degree of prosperity until the year of their banishment, those of Cagliari and other communities were treated in the harshest manner after 1430. They were compelled to live in special quarters and to wear special kinds of caps and were not allowed to wear jewels or to put on shoes of any other colour than black. Jewish traders were

forbidden, under the penalty of losing their goods, to transact business on Christian feast-days. In the years preceding the Alhambra Decree, the ominous influence of the 'Most Catholic Monarchs,' Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain, was painfully felt in Cagliari.

A Jew who employed a Christian was subject to a fine of twenty livres. Foreign Jews were forbidden, under the penalty of death, to settle in Sardinia without the permission of the Archbishop. A decree issued in 1481 fixed the penalties for an offence against Christianity and for the employment of Christian servants. For the former crime the Jew was to have his hands cut off; for the latter he was to receive 200 stripes and to pay a fine of 200 ducats, and the servant was to receive an equal number of lashes.

At one time Cagliari had been home to a prosperous Jewish community, and today, 500 years after the expulsion and total annihilation of the Sardinian Jewry, the area of Il Castelo - called Ghetto degli Ebrei- is one of the most attractive places in Sardinia for Jewish history pilgrims. The former Jewish Ghetto is located north of the medieval Torre del'Elefante, built by the Pisans as a defensive structure against the Aragonese.

Turning to the nineteenth century, a few Jewish families from Italy settled back on the island. Sardinian Jews were emancipated on March 29, 1848. With Italian unification in 1861, Sardinia reverted to Italian ownership where it has remained till today. In the years that followed, 180 Jews joined the Sardinian army. By Italian law regulating Jewish communal organization in 1931, Sardinian Jews were under the jurisdiction of the Jewish community in Rome.

Only a few Sardinian Jewish families returned to their ancestral island after the establishment of the unified state of Italy in the 1880s. Tragically, most of their descendants were killed during the Holocaust. Today there are very few Jews living in Sardinia, and there is no formal Jewish community on the Island. However, an increasing number of people who suspect that they have

Jewish roots are rediscovering these roots through the study of Judaism. Since 1992, Rabbi Barbara Aiello has been officiating at conversions of the Sardinian *Anousim* - descendants of those who were forced to give up their Jewish identity over 500 years ago.

Most *Anousim* have no records to prove their Jewishness, they just know that this is who they are. Traditional Judaism does not recognize their claim. In the early 1990s, Rabbi Barbara, the first reform Rabbi in Italy, became a leader of the southern Italian *B'nei Anousim* movement. For over twenty-five years, Rabbi Barbara has been performing numerous conversions, *B'nei Mitzvah* and weddings, and organizing educational events for Jews and non-Jews alike.

On 2nd September 2013, a piazza in Alghero was renamed 'Plaça de la Juharia', recalling the fact that that part of the city formed the Jewish quarter, prior to the expulsion of Jews in 1492. Taking part in the inauguration were Alghero's mayor as well as the Israeli ambassador to Italy. The dedication of the piazza was the start of a week of events sponsored by the city and local foundations, with input from the Union of Italian Jewish Communities and the Medieval archaeology department of the University of Sassari. Called 'La Settimana della Juharia', or Jewish Week, it led up to the European Day of Jewish Culture and included various cultural events as well as a conference on the Jews in Alghero.



Today in Sardinia there is not much to tell us that once there was a thriving Jewish community here, although curiously, Jewish influences do remain. For instance, the Sardinian word for Friday, *cenabura*, takes its meaning from the Latin *cena pura* - pure feast - or Shabbat meal and, even more strikingly, *caputanni* - meaning head of the year - from *Rosh Hashanah*, is used to denote the month of September.

Claire Connick

The Mortara Affair



Pope Pius IX

The strange story of the kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara has passed into Jewish (and Catholic) legend, been the subject of a book by David Kertzer, and a future film by Steven Spielberg, starring Mark Rylance. Many myths have been woven around the story, but the facts are clear.

In 1858 in Bologna, a six-year-old Jewish boy - Edgardo Mortara - was removed from his home by the Vatican police. It appears that some four years earlier he had been secretly baptised by a maidservant, Anna Morisi, who assumed because he was ill that he was about die, and according to Catholic tradition, must be formally taken into the Catholic Church to save his soul.

She had concealed the baptism from his parents, but finally decided to make confession. The priest to whom she confessed reported the matter to Rome, and the Congregation of the Inquisition gave orders that the child be taken forcibly from his parents and be brought up and educated as a Christian, maintaining that if he were to be brought up by Jewish parents, they could not give him the essential Catholic education.

A force of papal soldiers commanded by a Swiss officer went to the house of the Mortara family at ten o'clock at night, and presented an order for the arrest of Edgardo Mortara. The parents thought that there was a mistake, and said that Edgardo was but a child of six years. They were told in reply that the order presented was from the Holy Office, and

must be complied with, so the child was taken from them. Their attempt to obtain his release on the ground that Anna Morisi had acted out of spite - a statement which was supported by the fact that the girl had kept the matter secret for four years - quite apart from the assertion of the parents that the child had never been seriously ill, was no use. He was ordered to be brought up as a Christian in a Dominican convent. The little boy's parents were distraught, and denied that any baptism had taken place. Supported by the Jewish community, they approached first of all the Holy Office, then Cardinal Antonelli, the Vatican Secretary of State, and finally the Pope, Pius IX, himself. They got nowhere (a baptised child had to be brought up a Christian). The Pope said that if they wanted him back they would have to become Christians themselves.

The foreign press gave wide coverage to the affair, all anti-Pope - except of course the Catholic papers - the *Jewish Chronicle* in particular coming down hard on the Vatican. Its outraged leader column did not hesitate to decry the actions of the Pope. It wrote, 'We only know that in his dominions, and consequently under the sanction of laws administered by him, an atrocity has been perpetrated, and may again be perpetrated, of which the most cruel and benighted monarch of the middle ages would not have been guilty.'

Another terrible story added fuel to the flames. This concerned another nurse in Genoa who took a Jewish baby to her confessor for baptism. But Genoa, unlike Bologna, was not under papal control, so the priest refused, but advised the girl to starve the baby and when it was close to death to bring it to him to receive the last rites and have its soul saved. In this case, the doctors intervened and the priest was prosecuted.

The Board of Deputies discussed the case, trying to decide what, if any, its actions should be. It was hesitant to get involved, believing that it was not for English Jews to interfere in the deeds of another country and of another religion. Various schemes were suggested in the newspapers, such as using Rothschild

money to pay off the monks, or abducting the boy with the help of Garibaldi's army or even to abolish the papacy. In Italy Jewish families were terrified and many children were sent away to relatives in other lands.

Finally the Board decided to act, after it received a letter from the Jewish community of Turin asking both Britain and France to step in, and 'to look upon it as a sacred obligation to make an appeal to their respective governments.'



Sir Moses Montefiore

The Board called, not for the first time, on Sir Moses Montefiore, its President, to approach the British government. Sir Moses spoke to the Foreign Office and a very strongly-worded remonstrance was sent by all the main powers in Europe and America. The Pope simply replied, *non possumus* - we cannot do it.

Sir Moses agreed to beard the Pope in his den, taking his wife with him (though she was not at all well). He took letters from the Royal families of England and France. Protestant support was considerable. The English attaché at the Vatican tried in vain to get him an audience, but the Holy Father refused to see him. Sir Moses did see Cardinal Antonelli who agreed to speak to the Pope on his behalf, but the Pope was adamant. The boy would be brought up as a Christian in the convent until he was about sixteen when he could choose for himself. The Montefiores were very

upset and when back in England tried to approach the new king of Italy, Victor Emanuel, but again with no success.

Young Edgardo continued his schooling under the control of the Catholic Church. The Pope remained steadfastly determined not to give Edgardo up, declaring: 'What I have done for this boy, I had the right and the duty to do. If it happened again, I would do the same thing.' When a delegation from Rome's Jewish community attended their annual meeting at the Vatican in January 1861, they were surprised to find the nine year-old Edgardo at the pontiff's side.

When, many years later, the Pope admitted young Mortara to the Vatican to continue his education, he told him 'You were removed from the darkness of death, in which your family is still immured.' He eventually became a priest and a Vatican ambassador, a scholar and a linguist and died in 1940.

The Mortara Affair was an important feature in Italian Jewish history. Before the event, the Jews of the Papal States, numbering 15,000 or so by 1858, were grateful to Pope Pius IX because he had ended the long-standing legal obligation for them to attend sermons in church four times a year, based on that week's Torah portion and aimed at their conversion to Christianity. He had also torn down the gates of the Roman Ghetto despite the objections of many Christians. However, Jews remained under many restrictions and the vast majority still lived in the ghetto.



Cardinal Giacomo Antonelli

On 15th November 1848, Pellegrino Rossi, the Minister of Justice of the Papal government, was assassinated. The



The kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara by Moritz Daniel Oppenheim 1862.

This is not an accurate record of how Mortara was taken - for example, no clergy were present.

following day, the liberals demanded a democratic government, social reforms and a declaration of war against the Austrian Empire to liberate long-held territories that were culturally and ethnically Italian. A few nights later Pope Pius left Rome disguised as an ordinary priest, and went out of the State to Gaeta, a fortress in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. Papal warnings of excommunication for political actions were received from Gaeta. The Constitutional Assembly convened in February 1849 and proclaimed the Roman Republic - soon to be crushed by Austrian and French intervention in support of the Pope.

Some of the press suggested that Rothschild loans to the Vatican should be withdrawn

At that time, before the Unification of Italy, Bologna was in Romagna, one of the Papal States; Papal lands were later confined to the Vatican. Some of the press suggested that Rothschild loans to the Vatican should be withdrawn, and Cavour, the Italian statesman, used the Mortara case in his fight against the Papal supremacy.

In the months before Pius IX's beatification by the Catholic Church in 2000, Jewish commentators and others in the international media raised the largely forgotten Mortara episode while analysing

the Pope's life and legacy. The basic facts of the Mortara case are far from unique, but it is nevertheless of particular importance because of its effect on public opinion in Italy, Britain and France, and as an example of the great sense of Jewish solidarity that emerged in the latter half of the nineteenth century as Jews rose to the cause of their brethren in various parts of the world.

The rights and wrongs of the kidnapping of Edgardo have rumbled on for many years. A book about the event was published by David Kertzer in 1997 and translated into many languages, including Hebrew. From the book a film was planned by Steven Spielberg, starring Mark Rylance, but it has not so far appeared, due apparently to difficulties over casting the part of Edgardo. However, it will certainly remain a *cause celebre*, bringing the Jewish and the Catholic religions into conflict for many years to come.



Father Pio Edgardo Mortada with his mother

Philippa Bernard

Baruch Spinoza (1634-1677)



Born into an orthodox Sephardi family in Amsterdam in 1632, Baruch Spinoza showed from an early age a remarkably brilliant mind. He attended the local *Talmud Torah* and might have been destined for the Rabbinate, had not his ideas put him at odds with the community. As well as his lessons in Hebrew and the Bible at the local *yeshiva*, he also studied Latin, mathematics, physics, mechanics, astronomy, chemistry, and the medicine of the day. He trained as a lens grinder, but soon began to develop controversial ideas, not only on the truths contained in the Hebrew Bible but also on the nature of God, which led to his excommunication, though he never declared himself in denial of the existence of God. Bertrand Russell called him the noblest and most lovable of the great philosophers, and many view him as the greatest Jewish philosopher since Maimonides.

It was not long - he was still only twenty-three years old - before these heretical beliefs came to the notice of the Amsterdam Jewish authorities and he was summoned to defend them before the *Beth Din*. He put forward his view that angels were merely phantoms, that the soul is identified in the Bible with life and is regarded as mortal, and that in calling God 'great' the Scripture implies that God had the nature of man, that is, body. It was suggested that if he promised to keep his views to himself he might receive a

sum of money and be allowed to remain within the community. This offer was refused and a *cherem* was issued against him. So strong was this order that he was shunned by the Dutch Jewish community and even by his own family. The wording of the *cherem* was in Portuguese. It reads (in part), 'The Chiefs of the Council make known to you that having long known of the evil opinions and acts of Baruch de Spinoza, they have endeavoured by various means and promises to turn him from evil ways. Not being able to find any remedy, but on the contrary receiving every day more information about the abominable heresies practised and taught by him ... the council decided with the advice of the Rabbi that the said Spinoza should be cut off from the Nation of Israel.'

Spinoza moved away from Amsterdam, adding to his small income by taking pupils for Latin and Mathematics. He is believed never again to have come into contact with a Jewish person. He moved to the Hague, where he lived for the rest of his life. His early books dealt with Biblical criticism, mingled with political theory. His investigation into the history of how and when the Bible was written - *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* - criticises the clergy's view of the Bible, preferring the idea that the Scriptures can be interpreted in a way that is entirely compatible with a liberal theology. The solution to this state of affairs, Spinoza believed, was to examine the Bible anew and find the doctrines of the 'true religion'. Only then would we be able to find out exactly what we need to do to show proper respect for God and obtain blessedness.

Religious leaders were generally helped by the civil authority, which threatened to punish all deviations from theological orthodoxy as sedition. The result was a State religion that had no rational foundations, a mere respect that involved adulation and mysteries but no true worship of God. Spinoza denied that the Jewish prophets possessed any knowledge beyond that of ordinary mortals, and said that the history of the Jews is no more extraordinary than that of other people. The *Tractatus* was one of the few books to be officially banned in the Netherlands during this period. It was

soon the topic of heated discussion throughout Europe.

The political treatise, written in 1675 though not published until 1778, after Spinoza's death, caused much upheaval. The subtitle of the work was '*In which a society, monarchy or oligarchy, can be best governed, and not fall into tyranny, and how the peace and liberty of citizens must not be violated*'. He believed that in a state of nature there is no right or wrong, for wrong consists of disobeying the law. The King could do no wrong, and rebellion of any kind was not an answer. The Church should be subordinate to the State. Freedom of opinion and of speech was all important.

At a time when all Europe was becoming embroiled in the ideas of the Enlightenment, Spinoza found himself engrossed in the works of René Descartes, the pursuit of reason rather than tradition. This was the basis of his greatest work, the *Ethics*. It was written between 1661 and 1675 and was first published posthumously in 1677. It is composed in the style of a geometrical treatise, much like Euclid's *Elements*, with each book comprising a set of definitions, axioms, propositions, and other features that make up the formal apparatus of geometry. The book is in three parts: Of God, Of Nature and its Origin, and The Origin and Nature of Emotions. What Spinoza wished to demonstrate was the truth about God, nature and especially ourselves; and the highest principles of society, religion and the good life.



René Descartes

Despite concentrating principally on metaphysics, physics, anthropology and psychology, Spinoza took the crucial message of the work to be ethical in nature. It consists of a demonstration showing that our happiness and well-

being lie not in a life enslaved to the passions and to the transitory affairs which we ordinarily pursue, nor in the superstitions that pass as religion, but rather in a life of reason. To support these broadly ethical conclusions, however, Spinoza wanted first to clarify the existence of the universe and show it for what it really is. He presents the basic elements of his picture of God. God is the infinite, unique substance of the universe. There is only one substance in the universe; it is God; and everything else that is, is in God. God has *all* possible attributes, so if there were to be another 'substance', Spinoza maintained, then the attribute to be possessed by this second substance would be one of the attributes already possessed by God. He had already established that no two substances can have the same attribute, therefore, there can be, besides God, no such second substance. 'Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God.'

Of particular interest to Spinoza is imagination. This he takes to be a general capacity of representing external bodies as present, whether they are actually present or not. It includes memory and sense perception as well. Since it is clearly impossible to live a good life without this, Spinoza concedes that it is 'in this way [that] I know almost all the things that are useful in life'. That being said, Spinoza consistently opposes imagination to intellect and views it as providing no more than confused perception. To use his preferred terminology, the ideas of the imagination are inadequate. They may be essential for the lives that we live, but they give us a distorted and incomplete picture of the things in it. To understand why, it is useful to begin with sense perception. This is the most important form of imaginative perception, and it is from this form that all others derive.

In the course of this monumental work, Spinoza ranges over the whole gamut of emotions, human action and behaviour, and the relationship between God and man. 'Without intelligence there is not rational life: and things are only good, in so far as they aid man in his enjoyment of the intellectual life, which is defined by intelligence. Contrariwise, whatsoever things hinder man's perfecting of his

reason, and capability to enjoy the rational life, are alone called evil.'

Spinoza ends his *Ethics* acknowledging that the book is not easy to read and take in: 'If the way I have shown to lead to these things now seems very hard, still, it can be found. And of course, what is found so rarely must be hard. For if salvation were at hand, and could be found without great effort, how could nearly everyone neglect it? But all things excellent are as difficult as they are rare.'



George Eliot

The *Ethics*, according to the Catholic Church, only served to bring the author into further disrepute. The book was put on the Church's Index of forbidden books. The first known translation of the *Ethics* into English was completed in 1856 by the novelist George Eliot, though not published until much later. Spinoza, the great rationalist, was influenced by many thinkers before him, from virtually every area of philosophy, and his writings reveal such different sources as Stoicism, Jewish Rationalism, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Descartes, and a variety of heterodox religious thinkers of his day. In his turn he was to influence many philosophers who came after him.

In spite of his dismissal from the Jewish community, Spinoza must surely take his place among the many great Jewish philosophers - Wittgenstein, Freud, Marx, Einstein, Buber and many more. A great rationalist, his power of thought may come largely from his Jewish background and his knowledge of biblical history. To Spinoza we owe a vital link in the chain of rational thought from Descartes to A.J. Ayer; his books will continue to be studied by philosophy students all over the world.

Philippa Bernard

Shadows in the Bible

3. Jethro



Jethro is a somewhat mystical figure. He was supposed to be the father-in-law of Moses, who married his daughter Zipporah. However he is given more than one name. Apart from Jethro, this ancestral figure is also referred to as Reuel (or Raguel, as in Exodus), or as Hobab in the Book of Numbers. He was a priest in Midian, and when Moses left Egypt, having killed an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew slave, he fled to Jethro. Here Moses intervened in a water-access dispute between Jethro's seven daughters and the local shepherds. So he was invited into Jethro's home to partake of his hospitality as a gesture of thanks. Moses was aware that he was a stranger in exile, and after marrying Jethro's daughter he called his first son Gershom 'stranger'.

Moses worked for Jethro as a shepherd for forty years before returning to Egypt to lead the Israelites to the promised land. Jethro learned of Moses' leadership of the Israelites and wished to meet him. They met in the wilderness at the 'Mountain of God' and Moses told Jethro all that had taken place. Jethro said, 'Blessed be the Lord, who has delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of Pharaoh, and who has delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. Now I know that the Lord is greater than all the gods; for, in the very thing in which they behaved proudly, He was above them.'

Jethro is revered as the chief prophet in the Druze religion. He is believed to be a 'hidden' and 'true prophet' who communicated directly with God and then passed on that knowledge to Moses.

Moritz Daniel Oppenheim (1800-1882)



Self Portrait c. 1815

Moritz Daniel Oppenheim was considered to be the first Jewish painter of the modern era - since he was the first Jewish artist to gain acceptance in the non-Jewish German society. While many Jewish eighteenth and nineteenth century artists converted to Christianity in order to gain acceptance as artists in the modern world, Oppenheim remained an observant and dedicated Jew throughout his lifetime. He was the first artist in the nineteenth century to be outspoken about his strong Jewish identity, while simultaneously working within the German non-Jewish sector.

Prior to the emancipation of European Jewry, Jewish artists had been confined within their ghettos, prohibited from classical art institutions and apprenticeships with master artists. A Jewish artist's work could only reach as far as his community but Moritz Oppenheim became the first Jewish painter to receive classical artistic training and exposure to modern artistic movements. He was also the first to gain official recognition from the non-Jewish world.

Oppenheim first studied art in his home town of Hanau, and later in Munich and Paris. Copying the works of Old Masters was part of his studies at the academy and

even at the age of nineteen, the copies he made as a student revealed his undeniably Jewish perspective. For instance, in copying Raphael's *Madonna della Tenda*, the then 19-year-old student simply omitted the details that seemed too distinctly Christian to him. Oppenheim's painting, for example, does not depict young John the Baptist's cross staff or the halos that appear above the figures' heads in the original painting.

He received his first lessons in painting from Conrad Westermayr in Hanau, and entered the Munich Academy of Arts at the age of seventeen. Later he visited Paris, where Jean-Baptiste Regnault became his teacher. He then went to Rome, where he studied with Bertel Thorvaldsen, Barthold Georg Niebuhr, and Johann Friedrich Overbeck. There he closely observed the life of the Jewish ghetto and made sketches of the various phases of its domestic and religious life, in preparation for several large canvases which he painted upon his return to Germany.

In 1825 he settled in Frankfurt, and shortly after, exhibited his painting *David Playing Before Saul*, which attracted a great number of admirers from all parts of Europe to his studio. In 1832, at the insistence of Goethe, Charles Frederick, Grand Duke of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach conferred upon him the honorary title of professor. Later, Oppenheim taught at the Städelsches Institut, where Julius Bien was one of his students.

In his twenties, Oppenheim was already considered a successful portrait painter and won numerous competitions. From the 1830s to the 1850s, his later work explored the encounter between Jewish traditions and the modern world, as experienced by post-emancipation European Jewry. He was the official portraitist of the Rothschild family - which is why he is sometimes referred to as the 'Painter of the Rothschilds and the Rothschild of Painters.' He was also commissioned to paint the portraits of Kaiser Otto IV and Joseph II in 1839.

Oppenheim's portraits were not only 'private' paintings; they also shaped the public image of the Jewish middle class, including intellectuals such as Heinrich Heine and Ludwig Börne and the

philologist Jakob Weil. He painted the lawyer, notary, journalist and politician Gabriel Riesser, who was the first Jewish judge in Germany. He became known in non-Jewish circles as a portraitist of prominent gentiles and Jews - work that earned him universal acclaim.

Much of Oppenheim's art focuses on the depiction of Jewish culture, traditions and religion. But even more significantly, it portrays the socio-political struggles of the Jewish community - the difficulties and the conflict which German Jews experienced as they tried to become emancipated and assimilated individuals, while still holding onto their Jewish identities. Sentimental yearnings for the past as well as the anti-Semitic experiences of the present were also common themes in Oppenheim's work, as he sought to find solutions to the German Jewish dilemma of the mid-nineteenth century.

Oppenheim carefully chose which aspects of Jewish life to focus upon in order to accomplish his own personal goals of painting Jews in a positive light for German audiences. Many of his paintings depict the Jewish family surrounded by books and immersed in learning, in an effort to combat the common stereotype that Jews were uncultured. The Jewish family is also often portrayed in Oppenheim's paintings, in keeping with the value German society placed on it at the time and the belief that a strong family life bred morality.



Lionel Nathan de Rothschild

Through his work, Oppenheim tried to preserve and emphasise Jewish identity as well as to challenge the assumptions of his

Amusement Arcade

A Jew in traditional Polish garb, finds an empty compartment in the train which he has boarded on his way to Lvov. He goes about making himself comfortable, unbuttoning his coat, opening a newspaper, and putting his feet up on the opposite seat.

A few minutes later, the door opens and a man in modern dress enters and sits down. The Jew immediately pulls himself together, takes his feet off the seat and assumes a more correct pose.

The stranger sits in silence, looking through his notebook and apparently making some calculations.

‘Excuse me’, he says suddenly, ‘do you know when Tisha B’Av falls this year?’

‘Aha’, says the Jew – and puts his feet back up.



An elderly Jewish couple on their way to a holiday resort in Hawaii were arguing about the correct way to pronounce the name of the Island. He was sure it was *Havaii* and she insisted it was *Hawaii*.

As soon as they got off the plane, they ran over to the first person they saw. ‘Hi!’ said the husband, ‘would you mind telling me how you pronounce the name of this Island?’

‘*Havaii*’ the man replied. ‘Thank you’ said the husband - very pleased with himself.

‘You’re welcome’ said the man.



The Sabbath Blessing 1867

non-Jewish audience. To do so, the artist depicted desirable aspects of Jewish life and culture. In several paintings showing late eighteenth century pre-emancipation Jewish ghettos, he portrays the ghettos as clean, warm and comfortable, defying the common conception that they were dirty and had uncomfortable living conditions.



Shavuot

Oppenheim’s ‘*Scenes from Traditional Jewish Family Life*’ may be interpreted as a statement on German Jews’ cultural affiliation. Bourgeois values bordering on cliché, such as piety, sense of family, education and respectability, are brought to the fore through historical genre painting, thus emphasizing alignment with the Christian bourgeoisie’s guiding principles.

These paintings enabled the non-Jews to identify with the foreign traditions and customs of Jews. The series was

systematically reproduced in different techniques and very consciously intended for a mass audience.

Oppenheim's studies of Jewish life, his pictures of Emperor Joseph II and Moses Mendelssohn, and his portraits from life of Ludwig Börne and other contemporary Jewish notables, established his reputation as one of the foremost Jewish artists of the nineteenth century. His *Return of the Jewish Volunteer* is among his most famous works and was frequently reproduced; others include *Mignon and the Harper*, *Italian Genre Scene*, *Confirmation*, and *Sabbath Blessing*. All these are characteristic examples of his power of conception and skill at grouping.



David Playing Before Saul

It is a sad fact that approximately one third of the almost 350 of Oppenheim’s documented paintings are considered lost. However, many of them found their way to other countries after 1933, in the baggage of emigrating Jews. As a result, today some of the most important pieces by Oppenheim are to be found in the collections of the Jewish Museum New York and the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.

Claire Connick



Philip Sober writes:

Reading Philippa Bernard's article about Amersham in World War II reminded me of living in Slough during the War.

I was evacuated to a village near Honiton, Devon in 1940. After a visit from my sisters, they decided that the conditions in which I lived were, in their view, inadequate and took me with them to Slough where my parents had moved to, to escape the London bombing. Interestingly, despite John Betjeman's injunction, no bombs fell on Slough. This was extraordinary considering that, just outside Slough there was one of the largest factory estates in the country, engaged in manufacturing war supplies.

The reason for the lack of bombs was that every night a smokescreen went up over Slough. This was created by smoke canisters which lined the pavement and were lit every evening. (My late brother-in-law was involved in the management of this operation). A dummy factory estate was built in Langley nearby and, I believe, was bombed once or twice, but the actual estate was not touched; a great success story for an act of deception that was one of many such stories during World War II.

The Jewish community was quite small in number and I had the job, from time to time, of acting as 'chief whip' going around the shops and houses to ensure that we had a *minyan* on a Saturday morning.

On High days and Holy days we used to worship in local schools wherever possible. The leader of the local community was a Mr. Gaskell Jacobs of the Times Furnishing Company. He always wore a morning suit with a grey cravat and a pearl tie pin. I believe he was slightly deaf as he used to finish singing half a bar after everyone else. This used to send us youngsters into paroxysms of mirth.

I was coached for my *Bar Mitzvah* by Dr. Jacobovits who lived in Windsor. He was the former Chief Rabbi of Berlin. He was a kindly other-worldly man with a thick German accent. He was the father of Emanuel who became the Chief Rabbi of Ireland and subsequently of the United Kingdom. My lessons with Dr. Jacobovits soon came to an end as his English was not very good. He handed me over to a learned member of his community - a Mr. Baker - who completed the job. I was eventually *Bar Mitzvah* at the old St. John's Wood Synagogue in Abbey Road, where my uncle was a Warden. When the war was over, my family returned to London. I still have fond memories of growing up in the Buckinghamshire countryside.

Our April Fool message in the previous issue, prompted this clever letter from Cheryl Drew:

I note your excellent plan to make the synagogue more 'organic' and to improve the already superb after-Service *kiddushim*. A further suggestion - why not place a large fish tank in the Main Hall adjacent to the Friedlander Room - fill the same with *Poissons d'Avril* which will make excellent and fresh gefilte fish to feed the congregation.



My Past

**My past sings in the Wind of Time
In the wind which blows songs away...
It sings the song of infancy, of youth in the land of the Pharaohs
A song as beautiful as those of birds in springtime
It sings the songs of maturity under cloudier skies
The song of life which changes and remains constant
The song of life itself emotionally charged
Moments of hope, those of joy
Moments of despair, those of grief
Life's moments, its very fabric
The Song of a Time removed from Time and Space
A captured time the song revives and liberates
A time the wind takes beyond Time**

**Where does the past go to?
Which unknown yet familiar dimension welcomes it?
A space from where memories come back to us
A space packed with images
Unchanging images, some hurtful others pleasing
An intangible reality trailing life
But the wind comes from the North now
A cold wind the sun never warmed
The bright sun which shone in the land of the Pharaohs
And the frozen song ends in the freezing wind**

Colette Littman





Westminster Quarterly

Planning Your Diary

Erev Rosh Hashana

Friday 18th September

Rosh Hashana

Saturday 19th September

Kol Nidre

Sunday 27th September

Yom Kippur

Monday 28th September

Erev Sukkot

Friday 2nd October

Sukkot

Saturday 3rd October

Erev Simchat Torah

Friday 9th October

Simchat Torah

Saturday 10th October

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Please send letters, articles, photographs or other items of interest for publication in the Westminster Synagogue Quarterly directly to the Synagogue office or e-mail to editor@westminstersynagogue.org

